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Discussion Group Topic No. 5

WHAT KIND OF LAND POLICIES  
SHOULD THE NATION HAVE?

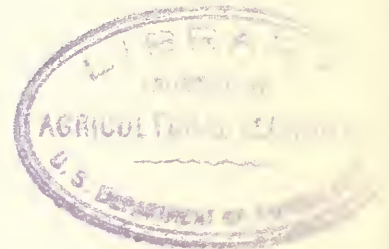
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This material has been prepared to supply assistance for discussion groups. It is not intended to direct attention to any particular point of view. Neither is it presumed to be a complete or even an orderly presentation of the discussion possibilities of the topic. Its purpose is to stimulate discussion. It is intended to assist in creating opportunities for discussion in the belief that through intense discussion people may find ways of thinking through for themselves vital questions which require democratic decision.

The attention of discussion leaders and others is called particularly to the availability of "Discussion: A Brief Guide to Methods". This contains practical suggestions and information.

Copies of "Discussion: A Brief Guide to Methods," and copies of this and other group discussion topics can be obtained from the Department of Agriculture, Room 202, Washington, D. C., or by writing to the agricultural college of your state.

February, 1935.



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Topic: WHAT KIND OF LAND POLICIES SHOULD THE NATION  
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The surface land area of the continental United States is just short of two billion acres. Less than 52 percent of this land has ever been devoted to farming in any way. Less than 22 percent has ever been in harvested crops during any one year. There are nevertheless practically no more good "free lands" such as those to which many pioneers moved and acute problems of soil depletion and erosion are rapidly developing. Many American farm families find themselves living upon lands that fail year after year to yield them a decent standard of living.

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1. WHAT SHOULD WE DO WITH THE APPROXIMATELY ONE BILLION ACRES OF LANDS IN THE UNITED STATES NOT NEEDED FOR FARM PRODUCTION?
2. WHY IS FARM ABANDONMENT SO PREVALENT IN SOME AREAS OF THE NATION?
3. WHAT WOULD HAPPEN IF THE GOVERNMENT TOOK OVER ALL LANDS AND LEASED THEM TO FAMILIES ON LONG TERM LEASES?
4. WHICH IS WORSE, TO HAVE FAMILIES LIVING IN CITY SLUMS OR LIVING ON SUBMARGINAL LANDS?
5. IF THE GOVERNMENT BUYS SUBMARGINAL FARMS WHAT SHALL IT DO WITH THE FAMILIES NOW LIVING ON THESE FARMS?
6. WILL GOVERNMENT PURCHASE OF SUBMARGINAL LANDS TEND TO ELIMINATE THE ONLY REMAINING REFUGE OF PROPERTYLESS FAMILIES WHO CANNOT AFFORD TO BUY GOOD LANDS OR OBTAIN CITY EMPLOYMENT?



S O M E P R O S A N D C O N S

I.

"Land planning is the last thing the nation should attempt. Free and unrestricted ownership and management of land by millions of families is the chief cause of the nation's unique place among the nations of the world. To tamper with the individual's right to do as he pleases with his land is to tamper with the heart of America's genius as a civilization. Of course, lands have been abused in this country, but to enforce any system of governmental regulations on the free use of lands would be more damaging than to wait for individuals to learn that it is to their own self interest to conserve their land resources."

II.

"Lands are the nation's greatest and most valuable national resource. Land is the basic heritage of all people. Individual ownership of farms, no matter how widely distributed, tends toward unjustifiable and harmful monopoly of lands. Land speculation, rural slums, and rural family insecurity can be eliminated only by the government owning all lands. So long as individual ownership prevails speculation in land values will continue, and so long as speculation in farm lands continues, farmers whether tenants or owners will continue to exploit and abuse soils and farmers will spend not cash incomes in buying more land rather than in improving the standard of living of their families."





III.

"While it is true that the right and opportunity of individual farm ownership is the last stronghold of old-fashioned Americanism and something that should be preserved, our lack of a constructive public land policy in the past has so exploited and even abused our lands that states and the Federal Government should furnish not only elaborate education on land use, but should spend considerable money in placing our lands in order. Flood control, erosion control, the taking of submarginal lands out of cultivation and even the zoning of areas for specific uses by counties, states and the Federal Government are necessary in order that the lands of the nation may be placed to their best use and conserved for future generations."

IV.

The chief thing needed in land policy is a graduated land tax to head off land monopoly and absentee ownership. A graduated tax should be applied to all holdings over a certain size, or to absentee ownership. This would permit large holdings which are economically sound on the basis of mechanized farming carried on by a family. Australia, and especially New Zealand have followed this program to good effect. Since the World War some other nations have adopted it.



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